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SPEECH

OF

HON. STEPHEN B. ELKINS

AT THE

TEACHERS' INSTITUTE

FOR


RANDOLPH COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

SEPTEMBER 16, 1909

WASHINGTON, D. C.
PRESS OF JUDD & DETWEILER, INC.
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SPEECH

OF

HON. STEPHEN B. ELKINS

Senator Elkins, on being introduced at the meeting of the Teachers' Institute for Randolph County, held at the court-house in the town of Elkins, said:

I did not come here to make a speech, but simply to meet a body of my fellow-citizens in my home town and county, respectable in point of numbers and intelligence, and whom I esteem most highly. I feel it is an honor to appear before the school teachers of Randolph County in their annual conference on educational matters. Good always comes from meetings of this kind. Interchange of ideas on any subject is both beneficial and instructive, and discussion always points the way to truth.

I am aware this is a critical audience, and I realize in the few minutes I shall claim its attention I will be held to account for any mistake I may make in the proper use of words; indeed, any departure from the

strict rules of construction I am sure will be promptly noticed. In the Senate a Senator speaks with more confidence, because Senators are more indulgent and less critical than teachers.

West Virginia has just cause to be proud of her public schools. The State has about seven thousand school-houses and over eight thousand teachers. In the list of States, West Virginia stands, according to population, fourth in school-houses and twelfth in teachers. Two-fifths of all the State expenditures go to maintaining schools.

Without teachers the world would stop in its onward progress toward higher ideals and better things. Teachers mold the bullets that win in nearly all the battles of life; they sow the seeds of thought and plant ideas in the young.

Thoughts and ideas move the world.

It is related that “in the second Messenian War, “ the Spartans, obeying the Delphic oracle, sent to “ Athens for a leader, and the Athenians in contempt “ sent them a lame school-master. But the school- “ master had within him the spirit of song, and did so “ inspire the Spartans that they finally gained their “ victory.”

Education is the most important factor in the life

of man. It lifts him up to higher levels, makes him better, and leads all forces in the general improvement of social conditions and civilization.

We boast, and rightfully too, of our free government, our industrial and commercial progress, our trade and commerce, our wonderful crops, fabulous in value, our railroads, our national wealth, our army and navy, our hospitals, and our charitable and benevolent institutions. All these are great and the outcome of an advancing civilization. But greater than any, or all of these combined, is the education of the people.

The chief glory of the Republic is its public-school system—the best in the world—among the fruits of which is the general intelligence of the people, as a whole, the most enlightened, the best informed, the freest, and the best governed in the world.

The real source and inspiring cause, the very foundation and basis of our general education, as well as of our liberties, our laws, our free institutions and free government, is the Christian religion, “the faith which the best intelligence of the best races has accepted.” If we turn, as we must, to the Bible for guidance, for light and truth in everything that concerns us and our welfare, here and hereafter, we find it favors education.

Emerson says: "The Bible is an engine of education of the first power. It does more than all other books. It is an index everywhere of light. All over the world where that book is found and honored there is light; where it is not found there is darkness."

From a literary standpoint, for purity and simplicity of style and richness of literature, the Bible excels all other books. After 3,000 years no poem has been written equal to the book of Job; it stands unrivaled in all literature. Among the learned men, the seers and the prophets, whose writings and teachings go to make up the Bible, Moses and Paul are in the front rank.

Moses, the greatest law-giver of all the ages, was learned in the arts, science, and philosophy of his time. He was versed in Egyptian lore and in all the arts and learning of Egypt. No man surpassed him in education and wisdom. If we come to the New Testament, Paul stands out as not only learned in the law, but the best educated man of his time.

Education, in its broadest and best sense, means knowledge of one's self, the cultivation of the soul. When death enters the body, the soul is all that abides and goes on forever. Emancipated from the burdens and hindrances of the flesh, just as it was in the body,

the soul passes into the realms of the boundless ether, into the presence of "the Light that never was on sea or land," into that

"* * * lucid interspace of world and world,
Where never creeps a cloud or moves a wind,
Nor ever falls the least white star of snow,
Nor ever faintest roll of thunder moans,
Nor sound of human sorrow mounts to mar
Their sacred everlasting calm."

Here may be found "the house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," the home of spirits.

Having this in mind, there is laid upon teachers the most serious and far-reaching responsibility, not only the responsibility for the education which fits man for life, but the education of the soul, which fits it for eternity.

I cannot suggest anything new on the importance and necessity of education. Who can? The subject has been exhausted. The greatest speech, the greatest plea ever made for education, is found in the Bible. From the time of Solomon until now, no speaker, no orator, no teacher, and no statesman has been able to add a word to this wonderful plea, reaching across the gulf of years that divides the present from the dim past, it speaks to us today more beautifully, more

forcibly and more eloquently than anything ever said on the subject. Allow me to read these wonderful words:

“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom,
 And the man that getteth understanding,
 For the gaining of it is better than the gaining of silver
 And the profit thereof than fine gold.
 She is more precious than rubies;
 And none of the things thou canst desire are to be compared unto her.
 Length of days is in her right hand;
 In her left hand are riches and honor.
 Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
 And all her paths are peace.
 She is the tree of life to them that lay hold upon her
 And happy is every one that retaineth her.”

Prov. 3: 13-18.

Consider what these words promise as the fruits of wisdom and education:

Happiness,
 Long Life,
 Riches and Honor,
 Pleasantness and Peace.

What a marvelous procession of benefits of the things most desired by man! Can we imagine anything more man could wish?

Happiness is the first promise. All the world wants and seeks happiness, but how few find it!

The great prince and Moorish king, Abdalrahman, under whose reign the throne of Cordova reached the zenith of its power, in summing up his life and the happiness that had come to him, said:

“I have now reigned fifty years in victory or peace, beloved by my subjects, dreaded by my enemies, and respected by my allies. Riches and honor, power and pleasure have waited on my call, nor does any earthly blessing appear to have been wanting in my felicity. In this situation I have diligently numbered the days of pure and genuine happiness, which have fallen to my lot; they amount to fourteen. O Man, place not thy confidence in this present world!”

Think of it! In a long reign of fifty years this great king had only fourteen days of genuine happiness. He had everything else, but happiness did not come to him because he did not get true wisdom and understanding. He did not look for happiness within; he did not know himself; he did not study the soul; did not know that the Kingdom of God is within us. He sought happiness outside of himself—in the possession of honor, power, wealth, and material things—just as men seek happiness today, and he failed to find it. Money, power, honor, and position *do not* bring happiness.

Long life is also promised. The world as never before is trying to find ways to prolong human life. Man wants long life more than he wants anything else.

Riches and honor follow. Next to long life, high station, honor, and wealth are what man most desires.

Then comes the last promise as the crowning perfection of all: pleasantness and peace, even the tree of life, to those who lay hold upon wisdom.

In addition to these promises, the words declare wisdom and education are better than silver and gold. All know the efforts, the work, toil and sleepless nights spent in acquiring wealth, because in this age we cannot live without money. We want it and we need it, because it commands and brings to us not only the things we must have, but the luxuries of the whole earth.

These words go further and say education is more precious than rubies. In Solomon's time, and through all the ages, jewels and rubies have been precious, sought after, and prized, and every lady in this hall, as well as every one out of it, throughout the earth, so far as I know or have heard, love jewels, especially rubies. But the value of these jewels is surpassed by wisdom and understanding.

The climax is reached when it is said that nothing we can desire can be compared to education. Put all of our desires together, pile them as high as we may, and if we had them all satisfied, yet they would not compare with wisdom. This goes as far as the human mind can reach. For my part, I know nothing in language and the whole range of literature so simple, so beautiful, and so comprehensive as these words from Proverbs.

Solomon says get wisdom and understanding. This means not only education and knowledge of ourselves, but knowledge of the wide world and all that is in it, and all the stars that look down upon it.

The Greeks said, "Know thyself," and, in knowing thyself, know the good and follow it. But this is the one thing we don't know and don't do. We know less about ourselves than about anything else. A man that knows himself can control himself; and the man that controls himself can govern a kingdom. How few people know themselves! Seeing their character in others, they would refuse to believe it was their own, just as one would not know one's own hand if it were on some other person; yet, we see our own hands every day and hour.

Epictetus says, "You will be of great service to the State if you shall raise, not the roof of the house, but the souls of the citizens."

Man has always failed to study his soul, to look within, to know himself. He can command armies, do great things, conquer nature, but he does not know himself and is rarely the captain of his own soul.

Being captain of his own soul, knowing himself, man could overcome almost everything, control matter, have the faith that can remove mountains, converse with friends around the globe, and, in the words of the lamented Marion Crawford, "move into eternity serenely."

What we call death would then be a mere incident, robbed of its terrors, to be met, not with timidity and trembling, but satisfaction. The soul then, at its own instance, could put aside the worn-out body and pass serenely to its home in the heavens.